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ABSTRACT

A discussion of the teaching of English for academic purposes (EAP) focuses on criticism that the content of such courses is thin and that they are offered as a service to other disciplines. It is proposed that the emphasis of EAP instruction be shifted to the role English plays as a medium for conveying meaning to the ways in which English is embedded in social, cultural, and political relationships. The context of this discussion is the teaching of English in Hong Kong, where the language conveys many colonial, racial, class, and gender assumptions. It is argued that EAP instruction should address, on one hand, the ambivalence of students learning a language they both resent and need, and on the other hand, the "decolonialization" of English. This implies instruction in language awareness, not of the type that focuses on linguistic forms or genres or literary uses, but that investigates students' understandings of the language and its relationship to cultural context. (MSE)

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Beyond (F)utilitarianism: English *as* academic purpose

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Abstract

To avoid the criticism that English for Academic Purposes (EAP) is *futilitarian* - the content of courses may be pedagogically thin and it may operate as little more than a service industry to other disciplines - it may be useful to question the stress on English *for* academic communication (with its assumption that language can be a neutral medium through which meanings pass) and instead to develop a focus on English itself. This focus on English would challenge both the language/content divide and the political quietism of EAP by looking at the *worldliness* of English, at the ways in which English is embedded in social, cultural and political relationships.

Broadly speaking, there appear to be two main pedagogical challenges faced by courses in English for academic purposes (EAP). The first concerns the basic question of what EAP courses should be about and addresses the constant struggle to establish meaningful course content. While the relative specificity of EAP courses, their audience of tertiary students and the obvious need to provide 'academic' content, should elevate these courses from the trivialization of content common to many 'communicative' language classes (in which content becomes nothing more than material to provide motivation to communicate), the difficulties in finding appropriate substantive content nevertheless often lead to the potential problem of *futility*: the content has little pedagogical rationale beyond serving as a medium for language learning. The second challenge concerns the role of EAP courses as a form of service industry to their institution and addresses the growing criticism that much of EAP is conservative, assimilationist and dominated by an ideology of pragmatism. This pragmatist orientation runs the danger of constructing EAP classes round the principle of *utilitarianism*: education is understood in terms of actions and their supposed consequences without attempting to deal with personal, contextual or cultural relationships. Put together, these two challenges present the problem of *futilitarianism*. It seems to me that without addressing these two challenges, other concerns such as whether English courses are 'efficient', how they should be evaluated, or what role they should play relative to other disciplines, cannot be usefully discussed. This paper seeks to explore these two challenges and to suggest a potential way forward.

The difficulties raised by these two challenges seem to hinge on a number of basic beliefs in EAP. First is the commonly held view that English, or indeed any language, is merely a medium through which meanings are expressed, a channel through which ideas can pass back and forth unchanged. If, as I shall argue later, there are good reasons to question this assumption, the very idea of English *for* academic purposes, which rests on the belief that English is a neutral medium for achieving academic purposes, comes into question . Second, the related question of the divide between language and content needs to be explored. Once again, this view seems to suggest that language is a medium through which content passes, thus implying that we can conveniently focus either on language or on content. Third, there is the belief both within and outside EAP circles that EAP courses should be a form of service industry to other faculties. In this view, the role of EAP courses is simply to provide students with the tools to pursue their studies in

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their own disciplines. And lastly, there is the problem of the general tendency towards political quietism in applied linguistics. By this I mean that there has long been a proclivity to view language teaching as an innocent and neutral process unconnected to the politics of education, culture or knowledge.

What I want to suggest here is that it may be possible to avoid the futilitarianism of much EAP by questioning the 'for' of English for academic purposes with its implications that English is but a medium that can serve certain purposes. In place of this functional view of English, I want to suggest a return to a focus on English itself - English *as* academic purpose. This focus on English, however, challenges both the language/content divide and the political quietism of EAP by looking at English from a critical stance that recognizes the ways in which English is embedded in social, cultural and political relations. By focusing critically on language we may be able to overcome both the difficulty in establishing meaningful and educationally useful content in our courses and the criticism that EAP courses tend to be assimilationist.

Contents and discontents

There are a number of problems with developing the actual content of so-called content-based classes. If the content is to be based on the disciplinary area in which the students study, there are three basic possibilities: first, the course is taught by a subject specialist with a special focus on problems faced by students studying in a second language. In many ways, this would seem the most desirable option at tertiary institutions in Hong Kong. Unfortunately, in the colonial context of the education system here, there appears to be a tendency to disregard the language problems faced by students and thus, although every university lecture or tutorial in English is in theory a content-based English class, students often find these lectures and tutorials of limited use in terms of language (and thus often content) learning. I still suspect that a better solution to the language difficulties faced by our students might be to offer far more help within their disciplines rather than to establish separate language centres. People with expertise in language education might be better employed helping subject teachers become more aware of language and language learning than teaching language as if it existed in some separate domain. The second possibility involves close cooperation between subject teachers and English teachers, so that assignments can be worked on together, lectures prepared together and so on. Such an approach, however, requires a great deal of cooperation between language centres and departments (for a discussion of some of the difficulties involved in even limited cooperation, see Leung and Hui, 1993), so without greater cooperation from other faculties this also becomes an unmanageable option. Thirdly, one can try to conduct semi-specialized courses within a language centre. The problem here, however, is that unless the teachers are in fact specialists in the discipline, they find themselves either teaching a course of rather vague generality (e.g. scientific English) or teaching a more specific course in which, as Spack (1988) has pointed out, they "find themselves in the uncomfortable position of being less knowledgeable than their students" (p.37).

A different approach to establishing academic course content involves the use not so much of specific, discipline-related material but rather of more general, theme- or issue-based materials. While this approach avoids some of the obstacles suggested above to discipline-based work and can also deal with the problem of students having varied disciplinary backgrounds, it runs into a number of other difficulties. Although such an approach is still based on the rationale that language is best learned while the focus is away from the medium, it becomes harder to give a pedagogical rationale for the content of many of these courses. Thus, although the object of the course is to teach academic English, there is a need to deal in educational terms with the reasons for and the effects of basing a course on "social issues" such as abortion, homosexuality, euthanasia and so on. One of the problems here is that on the one hand it is being argued that English is a medium for academic work and on the other that such content is a medium for learning English. We end up with two media, each supposedly a medium for the other. Thus, in order to teach English as a medium for academic purposes, issues and themes are discussed and written about as a means to promote the acquisition of that medium. But the focus of attention seems to be neither on the language nor on the pedagogical implications of the substantive content

introduced through the issues. The topics, although sometimes reasonably interesting, remain tangential both to students' lives and the pedagogical rationale for the courses. Finally, while teachers trying to use discipline-based materials may end up knowing less than their students, there is a similar problem with issue- or theme-based content in that language teachers set themselves up as informed knowers on a diverse range of topics. This may lead not only to rather shallow discussions and essays on the particular topics, but also, because teachers cannot be expected to be able to deal critically and comprehensively with such a broad range of topics, to an uncritical liberalism whereby topics are framed between overly simple dichotomies (Should prostitution be legalized? Is homosexuality normal? Should the death penalty be abolished? and so on)

If content-based approaches to EAP therefore present some interesting possibilities but also many problems, so too do the more rational, deductive language-based approaches. Although these have nearly always been intertwined with content-based courses (so that teachers of academic writing have frequently focused not only on content but also on various linguistic and organizational aspects of writing), they appear to have been growing in ascendancy more recently. From the rather general classifications of academic writing that had become a staple of academic writing classes, especially in North America, (e.g. essays that compare or contrast, describe, classify, show cause and effect, etc), work has now moved to more specific analysis of academic genres such as lab reports, case studies, legal documents, and so on (see Swales, 1990). While some have criticised this focus because it emphasizes discourse conventions rather than writing processes (e.g. Spack, 1988), other recent criticisms have raised serious concerns about the underlying pragmatist ideology of this approach and of EAP in general.

Following on from Santos' (1992) argument that ESL writing has remained strangely distanced from the ideological concerns that have recently been taken up in discussions of first language writing, Severino (1993) takes issue with Swales' (1990) claim that EAP can be considered in purely pragmatic terms. Rather, she suggests, it implies "an acculturative ideological stance - the desirability of assimilating quickly into academic, corporate and U.S. mainstream cultures" (p.182). Similarly, Benesch (1993) argues that there is a failure in EAP to question academic norms; instead they are presented as "positive artifacts of a normative academic culture into which ESL students should be assimilated" (p.710). Thus, the focus is always on changing the students in order to fit into the academic culture rather than trying to get the academic culture to adapt to the students. There is no questioning of the status quo and no questioning of the overall "accommodationist ideology that aims to assimilate ESL students uncritically into academic life" (p.714). Ultimately, she suggests, "the good intentions and hard work of EAP researchers may actually make life harder for both ESL faculty and students because of EAP's accommodation to traditional academic practices which limit the participation of nonnative-speaking students in academic culture" (p.713).

This criticism of the ideology of pragmatism in EAP does not just apply to genre-based approaches. Attempts to focus on either discipline-related content or on issues-based content run into the same difficulties. Discipline-based content, if taught by subject specialists, is not something the EAP teacher can greatly influence, and if taught by EAP teachers, is often something of which they only have a passing knowledge and thus are not able to explore critically. In both cases, the EAP course remains a form of language adjunct course that seeks to assimilate students unquestioningly into the broader academic culture. In the case of issues-based course content, there is clearly more scope for raising more critical questions, but to the extent that much of this work operates with an unclear pedagogical rationale - issues are introduced in order to facilitate language use rather than for some inherent educational purpose - it frequently fails to introduce any critical element to the course. And, as I have already suggested, framed as many issues-based courses are between a series of liberal dichotomies, they tend to reproduce a liberal approach to forms of knowledge and a conservative approach to language. Meanwhile, the pragmatic definition of EAP opens it up to further utilitarian pressures by demanding that courses be 'efficient' in terms of goals set not by those involved in language education but by faculties and other external bodies.

Yet there are convincing arguments why EAP courses should resist this pragmatist stance and develop a more critical approach. First, rather than apparently meeting the 'needs' of the students (as is often claimed after applying some form of 'needs analysis'), a pragmatist approach may do a pedagogical disservice to the students. A curricular focus on providing students only with academic-linguistic skills for dealing with academic work in other disciplines misses a crucial opportunity to help students to develop forms of linguistic, social and cultural criticism that would be of much greater benefit to them for understanding and questioning how language works both within and outside educational institutions. Second, by denying the political and ideological contexts of language education, a pragmatist stance adopts a conservative approach to education which at least needs to be acknowledged and justified, if not challenged. And third, this stance leads to a self-defeating position for EAP classes. If one of the difficulties we face in EAP is our marginalization and displacement into a secondary role compared to the other disciplines, this problem cannot be overcome by accepting a role as a service department providing what other departments feel they need.

There are, then, a number of concerns about EAP, concerns which might be characterised as 'futilitarianism'. The emphasis on English as a medium for content, opens up a divide whereby language is seen as a separate domain that can be taught in order that disciplines can use this neutral medium to construct their own meanings. EAP teachers are left either to teach courses that reproduce the language and content of subject areas or to find a pedagogical rationale for introducing various themes and issues into their classes. The frequent difficulties involved in trying to work cooperatively with other disciplines have led to the common option of a mixture of issues-based classes, in which the content is frequently a rather bland series of liberal "social issues". Alternatively, others have opted for more genre-based approaches, in which the relegation of all content to an acceptance of academic genres leads to an unquestioning assimilationist stance. The challenge, therefore, is how to develop a more critical form of EAP, one that would not see itself as a service industry to other departments or have as its goal the assimilation of students into academic culture, but rather one that would aim to challenge the students and the university in more critical fashion, a "dynamic" rather than a "passive" language centre in Shaw's (1993) terms.

Beyond language and content

In pursuing what this might mean, it is worth looking more sceptically at the language/content divide, which is central to many debates around the focus of EAP courses. This in turn I want to relate to another common (though less often explicitly discussed) division between 'rational' and 'natural' orientations in language learning, since a focus on the natural processes of language learning is frequently assumed to be linked to a focus on content, while a focus on rational processes is linked to a focus on language. In order to understand how these divisions have come about, I would like to take a step back to look at these arguments within the broader context of the history of English language teaching. At the end of his book *A History of English Language Teaching*, Howatt (1984) suggests that this history can be characterised by the interplay of two principal focuses. On the one hand, there has been the focus on 'natural' methods of acquisition, whereby learning a second language is seen as a process roughly akin to the natural processes of first language learning. The emphasis here has been on learning language through oral interaction, with conscious attention focused away from the medium itself and towards the meanings of the interaction. On the other hand, the 'rational' approach has focused conscious attention on the language itself, aiming to teach through formal learning of grammatical rules and lexical items. Kelly (1969) shows that natural, 'inductive' approaches to language teaching in Europe appear to have been at their strongest in classical times, during the Renaissance and in the late 19th and 20th centuries, while rational, 'deductive' approaches have dominated during Medieval and Enlightenment times. As both Kelly and Howatt point out, however, although one particular focus may be seen to predominate over the other at any specific time, they are frequently intertwined.

These two themes, though often intermingled, can clearly be seen in EAP, the natural orientation providing much of the rationale for content-based approaches, and the rational orientation providing a focus on language, especially in the recent emergence of genre-based

approaches. Natural approaches have dominated English language teaching in English-dominant[1] countries this century, from the Natural and Direct Methods at the turn of the century to the Natural Approach and communicative language teaching in more recent decades. Content-based teaching has emerged as a particular development of this orientation. Based on the idea that language can best be learned when attention is focused on learning content other than language through the medium of language, it has received some of its strongest support through work on the French Immersion programmes in Canada, which seek to teach French by immersing English-speaking students in French-medium subject classes.[2] Given that EAP is seen generally as a preparation for students before they enter their own disciplines, the arguments for such content-based approaches in EAP have seemed strong. Thus, Brinton, Snow and Wesche (1989) suggest that content-based English classes help match specific student needs (by relating the content to their disciplinary focus), improve motivation through relevance, use the prior knowledge of the students, provide real, contextualised and authentic language use, and focus on meaning rather than language.

What I want to suggest, however, is that it is worth questioning these two dichotomies (language/content and rational/natural), since they frame arguments about EAP in a very particular and perhaps unhelpful way. Both appear to be products of a certain way of thinking about language and learning that are now coming under considerable critical scrutiny from various quarters. The language/content divide with which we now operate appears to be a result of the attempt in structural linguistics to develop an analysis of language that could leave meaning out. Once the idea that one could focus on language structure without considering meaning was applied to language teaching, and once the division between the natural and the rational was linked to this, teaching language came to be seen as a process either of focusing consciously on language structures (be they syntactic or discoursal) or of focusing unconsciously on language by emphasizing other content. Missing in this formulation is the idea that language itself has meaning, that it is not simply a medium through which meanings based on some sense of objective reality or personal intention pass, that it may play a fundamental role in how we make sense of the world and the world makes sense of us.

In contrast to arguments in the sociolinguistic or neo-Whorfian mould, which attempt to relate linguistic structure and lexis to social strata or cultural forms, poststructural thinking on language has emphasized the need to understand language as already social and cultural. Thus, rather than trying to find correlations between language on the one hand and social or cultural structures on the other, this view demands that we consider language use to be a social practice, that we acknowledge that it is always/already social and cultural. Once language is seen as social practice, it cannot be isolated from its social, cultural and ideological contexts, so to write, speak, read, or listen can never be acts performed neutrally through some linguistic medium. Thus, in contrast to the humanist version of language, which emphasizes the centrality of human rationality in social relations and therefore considers language to be a medium through which rational, conscious subjects convey their meanings back and forth, this view suggests that meaning and ultimately subjectivity are produced through language, "that meaning is constituted within language and is not guaranteed by the subject which speaks it" (Weedon, 1987, p.22). It is through language, then, that we become subjects and it is through language that we battle to construct the world in different ways. "Once language is understood in terms of competing discourses, competing ways of giving meaning to the world, which imply differences in the organization of social power, then language becomes an important site of political struggle" (p.24). From this point of view, then, language is no longer a medium that can be separated from a notion of content but rather is a crucial site for investigation into how our lives are given (and denied) meaning through language.

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[1] I use the term 'English-dominant' in preference to 'English -speaking' in order to keep in mind the multilingual and multicultural realities of those countries that are often simply referred to as 'English-speaking countries' (Britain, USA, Australia etc).

[2] As Tsui (1992) has rightly pointed out, this model has been inappropriately applied to Hong Kong. Not only are there serious doubts about the real effectiveness of French Immersion classes, but their apparent success also needs to be seen in light of the way they have functioned as an elite stream for middle and upper middle class white Anglophone children. Thus immersion approach certainly cannot be simply applied to Hong Kong schools.

This view of language seems to have at least four important implications. First, since it emphasizes the fundamental role language plays in shaping our lives, it helps us to deal with questions around language far more effectively than a view of language as a neutral medium. Second, it brings into question the divide between language and content since it sees meaning not as something guaranteed by an external world or a language-using subject but rather as something constituted by competing discourses in language. In this view there is no useful distinction to be made between language and meaning. Third, if this understanding of language brings into question our status as rational individuals in control over our meanings, the divide between the rational and the natural must surely also become questionable. Thus, the idea that there is a real distinction to be made between some rational, detached faculty of thinking on the one hand and some natural but unconscious focus on meaning on the other hand becomes far less tenable. Finally, if language indeed plays such a central role in constituting meaning and even creating subjectivity, and if the distinction between rational and natural approaches to learning starts to appear less tenable, then to teach language *for* academic purposes as if it were merely a medium to be acquired would seem to miss the opportunity to focus on the central aspects of language itself. What I want to suggest is that a critical focus on language that is concerned neither with a language/content divide nor a rational/natural divide may be a crucial direction for EAP courses.

Critical language awareness

The recent increase in interest in more rational-deductive approaches to language in EAP appears to be part of a more general swing back to focus on language in ELT after some of the excesses of the anti-rationalist dogmas of communicative, experiential and humanistic language learning. As Ivanic puts it, "the idea of learning about language has got back on the agenda under a new name: 'language awareness'" (1990, p.122). This general move towards language awareness has been criticised by Fairclough (1992), however, because of its liberal-interventionist orientation. The language awareness movement, especially as it has grown up in Britain, is based on a liberal understanding of both education and language. Educational 'failure' is seen as something that can be overcome by bridging the gap between home and school or between different educational environments; it does not concern itself with the causes of the problems. And, while a liberal view of language may at times celebrate certain forms of diversity, it tends nevertheless to stress the inappropriateness of difference and the importance of standard norms, a view which amounts to "dressing up inequality as diversity" (Fairclough, 1992, p.15). The parallels between this liberal-interventionist view of education and the dominant model for English enhancement programmes in Hong Kong is clear: they operate on the belief that a bit more of the same thing will solve the problems of the students and that students need to learn to conform to the standards and norms of academic writing.

What Fairclough and his colleagues propose is a *critical* version of language awareness, which in turn is part of the larger focus on critical language study and critical discourse analysis (see e.g. Fairclough 1989). Critical language study, according to Fairclough (1992), "highlights how language conventions and language practices are invested with power relations and ideological processes which people are often unaware of" (p.7). It takes mainstream language study to task for failing to question language practices and conventions and thus obscuring "their political and ideological investment" (ibid.). Based on this view of language, Fairclough then argues for the need for critical language awareness: "given that power relations work increasingly at an implicit level through language, and given that language practices are increasingly targets for intervention and control, a critical awareness of language is a prerequisite for effective citizenship, and a democratic entitlement" (p.12).

This approach to critical language awareness seems to offer a useful way forward from some of the difficulties I suggested in the last section. Certainly, it is an interesting response both to the challenge that much EAP is guilty of political conservativism and to the problem of the language/content divide. By focusing on language as social practice and by always relating language to its broader social and ideological contexts, critical language awareness can focus on

both language and content simultaneously (and thus questions the divide itself) and can develop analyses critical of both linguistic and social norms. Nevertheless, I have some concerns about adopting this form of critical language awareness. First, there is a frequent tendency to operate with what I see as a rather reductive view of social relations, whereby a "dominant group" (or groups) has "power" which is maintained by the ideological manipulation of society. Thus, Fairclough (1989) discusses ideology in terms of assumptions underlying practices which "can often be shown to originate in the dominant class or the dominant bloc" (p.33), and Ivanic (1990) suggests that "powerful social groups determine how things, and particularly people, should be described" (pp.125-6). I believe we need a more complex vision of social and ideological relations than one in which certain groups hold power over the oppressed through ideology. Following Foucault's "avowedly anti-Marxist" position, which "rejects the reduction of all power-relations to class-relations" (Harland, 1987, p.166), and suggests instead that power operates through all social relations (see, for example, Foucault, 1980), I prefer to maintain a focus on the political while avoiding the language of "oppressed", "oppressors", "domination" and "emancipation". In this view, there is no ultimate source of power and inequality (located, for example, in class and socio-economic relations); rather, there are a multiplicity of power relationships operating in and through discourse.

Second, there is a concomitant tendency to believe that critical linguists can unveil the truth hidden in and by language. The basic premise here is that ideological meanings that favour the powerful over the powerless lie hidden in texts and that the estimable goal of the critical linguist is to reveal these. Fairclough (1989), for example, makes a distinction between "inculcation" - "the mechanism of power-holders who wish to preserve their power" - and "communication" - "the mechanism of emancipation and the struggle against domination" (p.75). This belief that ideologies can be analyzed through their linguistic realization has to confront two awkward questions, however: how such truths and realities are arrived at outside the linguistic and ideological frames that govern our lives and, perhaps most importantly, what types of diverse readings of different texts may in fact be possible. Clark (1992) makes this point when, after taking up a similar view that "much of social meaning is not explicit", and that critical language awareness is needed as a process of "unveiling or demystifying", as "an instrument of analysis for uncovering what is implicit - the underlying ideological content" (p.121), she suggests that this approach is nevertheless "somewhat deterministic - is seems that if only readers have the linguistic tools at their disposal they can get at the 'true meaning' of the text" (ibid.). There is a danger in some versions of critical linguistics that they posit a true meaning or a reality to be uncovered, a position that suggests a problematic divide between ideology (false) and reality (true) and a belief that there is ultimately a 'wrong' (ideologically obscured) and a 'right' (ideologically revealed) reading of a text, rather than a focus on "how one meaning wins credibility or legitimacy over other available meanings" (Clark, 1992, p.122). Third, this seems to suggest that language is somehow a medium through which ideological meanings pass. In a more equitably structured world, in a world in which people listened more carefully to critical linguists and in which we could arrive at some purer form of "communication" rather than "inculcation", language might somehow become a more transparent and truthful medium. Thus, there appears to be a rather problematic view here of language as a potentially neutral medium. Finally, it is perhaps worth asking to what extent awareness of apparent oppression can lead to emancipation. Thus, if, as Fairclough (1992) suggests, critical language study sees itself as a "resource for developing the consciousness of particularly those people who are dominated in a linguistic way" (pp.9-10), we might still want to ask "whose consciousness?"

Nevertheless, this work in critical language awareness opens up some important directions for working crucially with language. What I am interested in pursuing here is the idea that we can arrive at a focus for EAP courses that avoids the content/language divide, avoids the rather insipid liberal focus on "social issues", and avoids the pragmatic utilitarianism of genre-based approaches, and instead looks at language critically without falling into some of the pitfalls of critical language awareness. This, then, is not an approach to language that attempts to show its relationship to social and ideological forms, but rather a view of language that sees language as always "worldly" (see Pennycook, 1994). The point here is not to argue for the need to reveal conditions of oppression as they are realised in texts but rather to explore the "worldliness" of language, to look at language as always embedded in social, cultural, economic and political

relations. In this sense, the worldliness of English points not only to its global spread but also to how it both reflects and creates local social relations. Although this view of language as social action suggests that English is inseparable from the social, cultural, economic and political contexts in which it is used, it does not suggest that meanings in language are determined by macro relations of power. Rather, there is a space here for multiple readings of texts from different discursive positions and for the possibility of alternative meanings to be constructed through English.

The worldliness of Hong Kong English

In pursuing such a goal, it is worth considering these comments made by a first year student of mine about English in Hong Kong:

> Sometimes it comes to my mind that the compulsory learning of English in schools is one of the British government's political strategies.... By enforcing the compulsory education, more people in Hong Kong are ready to accept the British culture, customs and of course, the government policy. And if the majority of the English speakers in Hong Kong regard the language as superior to Chinese, it is reasonable or rational for them to support the government policy. In other words, the teaching of English is a kind of cultural intrusion in Hong Kong and may be regarded as a political weapon. Whenever I think about this, I will be very upset because all of the students are under the control of the Education Department which put too much stress on English. Students are just like the slaves of the Department because they follow and obey exactly what the examination requirement said.
>
> However, the above assumption does not affect my decision about taking the degree course of English. I love English simply because the language is fascinating. It is easy to learn English but difficult to master it well. Moreover, English is widely used in the world and because the territory is an international trade centre, many jobs require candidates possessing a good command of English. Therefore, I cannot deny that studying English can secure my future prospect. (Ma Wai Yin. 1993)

There are, I believe, a number of very interesting points in this statement. First, it strikes me that this student has a far more developed understanding of the role of English in Hong Kong than many people who claim expertise in this area. Second, she identifies English as "a political weapon" and a form of "cultural intrusion" in Hong Kong, thus suggesting that English cannot be separated from the colonial context in which it is used and that to learn and use English necessarily compromises her both politically and culturally. But third, she also acknowledges the importance of learning English, not just for pragmatic reasons but also out of a love for the language. There is a difficult ambivalence here, an anger at the cultural intrusion of English and its manipulation by a colonial government yet an affection for that same language and an acknowledgement of its importance in her life. Such ambivalences are by no means uncommon, for they can be found in many of the comments made about the postcolonial problematic of opposing the economies, political structures, cultures and languages of colonialism while at the same time doing so in and through a colonial language that has been part of one's social and educational life and which also allows access to a global audience.

In his essay 'Biggles, Mau Mau and I', for example, Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1993) recalls the "dance of contradictions" (p.138) he faced when he read and enjoyed Biggles' exciting escapades with the RAF, for it was this same RAF that was bombing the Mau Mau independence fighters in Kenya for whom his brother was fighting. Confronted for many years by the contradictions involved in writing in the language that was also the language of neocolonial oppression in Kenya, Ngugi eventually vowed to give up writing in English and to write first in Gikuyu. Other writers

have not had, or have not chosen to adopt, such an option and have continued to live with these contradictions. In his autobiographical work *Beyond a Boundary*, the Caribbean writer and political activist C.L.R. James (1963) recalls his love of the nineteenth century British novelist Thackeray and cricket during his school years. Although he later came to understand "the limitation on spirit, vision and self-respect which was imposed on us by the fact that our masters, our curriculum, our code of morals, *everything* began from the basis that Britain was the source of all light and leading, and our business was to admire, wonder, imitate, learn" (pp.38-9), he still acknowledges his "inexhaustible passion" for cricket and English literature (p.43). The Nigerian novelist Chinua Achebe, amongst many others, has also wrestled with these contradictions, making a plea that

> Those of us who have inherited the English language may not be in a position to appreciate the value of the inheritance. Or we may go on resenting it because it came as part of a package deal which included many other items of doubtful value and the positive atrocity of racial arrogance and prejudice which may yet set the world on fire. But let us not in rejecting the evil throw out the good with it. (Achebe, 1975, p.219)

What emerges from these comments is a deep sense of ambivalence. A difficulty in trying to write in a postcolonial world in the language of colonialism and neocolonialism. It is this same sense of ambivalence that seems to emerge so clearly from my student's comments about English and it is this sense of anger and frustration at English coupled with feelings sometimes of real affection for the language and sometimes simply of pragmatic acceptance that many Hong Kong students seem to feel. It is this sense of contradiction, along with many other issues around the social, cultural and political contexts of English in Hong Kong that I think we need to start to address.

One of the difficulties in dealing with the implications of the statement by my student lies in the concept of mastery of English. Searle (1983) makes this point well when he suggests that "when we talk of 'mastery' of the Standard language, we must be conscious of the terrible irony of the word, that the English language itself was the language of the master, the carrier of his arrogance and brutality." English, Searle suggests "has been a monumental force and institution of oppression and rabid exploitation throughout 400 years of imperialist history....It was made to scorn the languages it sought to replace, and told the colonised peoples that mimicry of its primacy among languages was a necessary badge of their social mobility as well as their continued humiliation and subjection". The challenge for us as teachers, Searle argues, is "to grasp that same language and give it a new content, to de-colonise its words, to de-mystify its meaning,...to rip out its class assumptions, its racism and appalling degradation of women, to make it truly *common*, to recreate it as a weapon for the freedom and understanding of our people" (p.68).

Conclusion

What I want to suggest here, then, is that first of all as language teachers we cannot treat English as if it were some neutral medium through which academic meanings can be encouraged to pass. Rather, it is a language, in the context of Hong Kong, already full of colonial, racial, class and gendered assumptions. While some of these meanings may adhere to particular words and phrases in the language, it is more in the worldliness of the language, in its use as a "political weapon" and as a form of "cultural intrusion" that its meanings adhere. The challenge, then, is on the one hand to address the ambivalence that many of our students feel, trapped between a language that they resent and a language that they need and may even like, and on the other to explore what it might mean to "de-colonise its words". If my notion of worldliness suggests that language cannot be separated from its contexts, it is not intended to imply that it is determined by them. That is to say, the process of decolonising English cannot be left to happen as a presumed result of the political decolonisation of Hong Kong. Rather, it is a process that we as English teachers need to pursue separately, for the decolonisation of English may well be a process on which decolonizations in other spheres will depend.

By focusing on the worldliness of English in Hong Kong, work in EAP can avoid the criticisms that it is shallow in content and conservative in practice. Although I by no means want to propose this as a sole EAP focus, I do think that this form of language awareness may be crucial in helping our students to deal with English. This is not a form of language awareness that makes linguistic forms or genres its principal focus of study, nor is it a form of critical language awareness that attempts to uncover ideological forms embedded in texts. Rather, it is a form of language awareness that aims to investigate students' understandings of language, to explore the ambivalent feelings that students often have towards the language, to develop ways of looking at English in Hong Kong that examine its relationships to colonialism, gender and socioeconomic status. Such a focus on English, I believe, can help overcome the futilitarianism that bedevils much of EAP at present.

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First Draft

My Life is a first
draft printed on paper once
used for other drafts

Agnes Lam